

APPENDIX B

THE SILVAS FAMILY IN OLD TOWN

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INTRODUCTION

On September 6, 1851, Maria Eugenia Silvas sold two parcels of land on Blocks 407 and 408 in Old Town San Diego to Julian Ames (SDCRO Deeds C:367-368). The property was subsequently sold to San Diego County Sheriff James McCoy on January 11, 1866 (SDCRO Deeds 2:224). McCoy built a house on the site in 1869, which was subsequently remodelled in 1887, and razed in 1927. The McCoy House Site is currently the subject of archaeological and historical research by the California Department of Parks and Recreation. While a great deal is known about McCoy, a county sheriff and state senator, little information had been uncovered on the earlier owners of the site. The object of this report is to shed light on these people, to assist in the interpretation of archaeological features and artifacts uncovered from the site, and to supplement previous historical research on the study area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The majority of the information found in this report was taken from the public records, research archives and libraries of the following: the San Diego Historical Society; the City and County of San Diego; the Family Research Library of the Church of Latter Day Saints in San Diego; and the archives of the San Diego Roman Catholic Diocese. Sources included family biographies and genealogies, research notes, census data, property assessments, deeds, maps, and other archival documents pertaining to the Silvas, Lisalde, Ybarra and Serrano families.

Additional genealogical information was gathered from the office of Ron Quinn, historian for the San Diego Coast District of the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and from interviews with members of the Silvas family.

General background on the period under study was found in Bancroft's History of California; Smythe's History of San Diego; and Pourade's The Explorers, The Time of the Bells, and Anza Conquers the Desert: the Anza Expeditions from Mexico to California and the Founding of San Francisco, 1774 to 1776.

Information on the social context in which these pioneer families lived was taken from Meyer and Sherman's The Course of Mexican History, Camarillo's Chicanos in California: a History of Mexican Americans in California; Schutz' Spain's Colonial Outpost in California; and articles by Mason, "The Garrisons of San Diego Presidio: 1770-1794," and Miranda, "Family Life in Early California."

THE SILVAS FAMILY IN OLD TOWN

While James McCoy is perhaps the best-known figure associated with this property, Maria Eugenia Silvas' connection to the site represents an earlier period, during which San Diego evolved from a frontier Spanish fort to a Mexican civil settlement. The descendants of Spanish/Mexican pioneers, Maria Eugenia Silvas and members of her family have been identified with a number of significant historic sites and events in Spanish Colonial Southern California¹. The Silvas family was representative of the pioneers who accepted the royal challenge to seek new homes in distant Alta California. The names of many, Serrano, Lissalde, Ybarra and Silvas, would, in the words of historian Richard F. Pourade, "sift down through the history of California" (Pourade 1971:80)

Records indicate that the majority of immigrants to Alta California during the late eighteenth century were from older frontier settlements in northwestern Mexico and Baja California. Most came from Sinaloa, which extended from Tepic to the Yaqui River; Sonora, which included the regions of Arizpe and Tepoca; and Pimería Alta, which stretched north to the Gila River (Bancroft 1963:19).

The colonists who came to Alta California from these regions represented varied stocks--*españoles* (Spaniards), *mestizos* (Spanish and Indian), *mulatos* (Spanish and African), and *Indios* (Indian). The shared experience of these people in Alta California was that of life on a relatively isolated frontier. This isolation bred a regional parochialism in which they and their descendants identified more with the province than with New Spain or Mexico (Camarillo 1984:3).

JOSE MIGUEL SILVAS

The progenitor of the Silvas family in San Diego was José Miguel Silvas. He was born in 1734 at Villa de Sinaloa, a presidial town in northwestern coastal New Spain. Sometime around 1765, he

¹ Maria Eugenia Silvas' uncle, Francisco Serrano, served as *alcalde* (mayor) of Los Angeles; her cousin, Jose Leandro Serrano, received a land grant in present-day Riverside County and became the first Hispanic settler in that part of the state; and several of her Serrano cousins were involved in the Battle of San Pasqual, fought on December 6-7, 1846, between Californio rangers and U.S. forces under the command of General Kearney (Northrop 1984:266; Mason 1978:416-417; Bancroft 1963; Smythe 1908:210; Pourade 1963:101-104).

married María Pascuala Lugo, daughter of Salvador de Lugo and María Josefa Francisca Espinosa of Villa de Sinaloa (Northrop 1984:265). Enlisting at the presidio of Terrenate, he became a *soldado de cuera* (leather-jacket soldier), a member of the presidial dragoons (San Diego Historical Society, Silvas Biographical Files).

The leather-jacket soldier took his name from a long, sleeveless coat made of six or seven layers of white tanned deerskin. He carried a two-ply cowhide and wood shield, or *escudo*, on his left arm. Both the jacket and shield were sufficient to repel Indian arrows, except at extremely close range. In order to protect his legs while travelling through thick chaparral, he wore a *defensas*, a leather apron that fastened to the pommel of his horse's saddle and hung down over his legs. (This apron would later evolve into the chaps of the American cowboy.) Besides carrying a musket and a broadsword, the leather-jacket soldier was adroit at handling the *lanza*, an extremely long, steel-tipped wooden lance. The traditions of the *soldado de cuera* would be used by the Californio lancers of the Mexican-American War, who routed the American dragoons at the Battle of San Pasqual (Pourade 1960:130-131).

In 1775, José Miguel Silvas volunteered to be part of the military detachment escorting Lt. Colonel Juan Bautista de Anza's expedition to colonize Alta California. Composed of about forty active or retired soldiers and their families from towns in Sinaloa, Sonora, and Jalisco, the expedition left San Miguel Horcasitas in Sonora. The group travelled north to Tubac (south of modern Tucson, Arizona) and, in September, crossed the Sonoran and Colorado deserts along the trail previously blazed by Anza. They reached Mission San Gabriel, Alta California, in January 1776 (Pourade 1971:73; Bean and Rawls 1988:30-31; Miranda 1987:12:5).

After helping to defuse a local Indian uprising at San Diego, the expedition reached Monterey in March 1776. Here it split into two groups: one remained to reinforce the presidio; and the other travelled north to found the presidio and mission of San Francisco (Pourade 1971:73; Bean and Rawls 1988:30-31). Accompanying the latter, Silvas was a founding member of the garrison, serving there from 1776 to 1782 (Mason 1978:415; Northrop 1984:266).

Although most of the members of the expedition were women and children, José Miguel Silvas' apparently left his own family at home. This fact is supported by the birth records of the children. José Manuel, María Josefa Gabriela, María Balbaneda, María Bernarda, and Ana María Gertrudis were all born at Villa de

Sinaloa between 1763 and 1779. The youngest, Rafael, was born in San Juan Capistrano in 1783, the only child born in Alta California (Northrop 1984:266-67).

Silvas appears to have returned to Sinaloa around 1780 or 1781 to bring his family to their new home. This date range is based on the birthdate of Maria Gertrudis in 1779 and the closure of the overland trail by the Yuma uprising of July 1781 (Bean and Rawls 1988:34-35).

Presidio census reports for 1782 place Silvas at San Francisco. By December 1, 1784, he was living in San Diego and was enumerated there. The birth of his son Rafael at San Juan Capistrano on November 30, 1783 might indicate either that the family was en route to San Diego or that Silvas spent some time with the mission garrison there before he was assigned to the presidio garrison at San Diego. The latter possibility has yet to be substantiated through archival sources (Northrop 1984:26; Mason 1978:407, 412-15).

José Miguel Silvas served at the San Diego Presidio garrison until his death in 1789. He died of unknown causes and was buried within the presidial compound on December 7, 1789. His wife, María Pascuala Lugo, died on February 2, 1824 at Los Angeles. In the mission death records for Mission San Gabriel, she was described as being *muy viejita* (very old) (Northrop 1984:265).

JOSE MANUEL SILVAS

The census records for the San Diego Presidio compiled on December 1, 1784 also list Silvas' twenty-one-year-old son, José Manuel Silvas, as a soldier in service there (Mason 1978:415). Due to the remoteness of the area, the majority of leather-jacket soldiers were recruited from among the sons of veteran presidial soldiers (Cisneros 1984:87).

Among the younger Silvas' duties was the patrolling of some 32,000 square miles in the San Diego Presidial District. Stretching 55 miles below the present U.S.-Mexico border to Mission San Miguel, the district extended roughly 125 miles north to Mission San Gabriel, and eastward across mountains and desert to the Colorado River (Pourade 1961:117).

On June 11, 1786, José Manuel Silvas married María Gertrudes Camacho, an 18-year-old from Mission Santa Gertrudis, Baja California, at Rosario, Baja California (Northrop 1984:265). In the 1790 census for the San Diego Presidio, José Manuel and María

Gertrudes were respectively listed as "español" and "mulata"² (Mason 1978:418). While the colonial government of New Spain required commandants to list the race, or "casta," of the soldiers under their commands, many lightened a person's racial origin in order to meet another bureaucratic regulation (Mason 1978:419; Callian 1995).

A decree of 1762 required that at least two-thirds of the militia soldiers at the presidios be *españoles*. Many of the garrisons of the northwestern frontier, such as Sinaloa and Sonora, were unable to meet this quota. In order to circumvent the decree, commandants would "lighten" the skins of their command. Many of the early settlers of Alta California also harbored a desire to lighten their original castas. For example, José María Pico, although listed as an *español* in San Diego in 1790, had two brothers listed as *mulatos* in Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. Another San Diegan, Máximo Alanís, was an *indio* at Alamos, Sonora in 1780. By the time he reached San Diego in 1782, he was a *mestizo*, someone of Spanish and Indian blood; by 1790, he was listed as an *español* (Mason 1978:419). Many Spanish *padres* and other colonial officials who tried to keep track of the actual racial composition of the citizenry raised their hands in frustration with the remark, "everyone calls themselves Spaniards!" (Miranda 1987:12:4).

California soldiers stationed at the Sinaloan and Sonoran presidios during the late 18th century were, according to most historians, to a greater or lesser degree tri-racial. Their cast designations in the census lists were actually approximations that varied each decade from place to place, according to the whims and frustrations of the enumerators (Mason 1978:423, note 23; Callian 1995).

José Manuel Silvas and María Gertrudes Camacho had at least ten children: Juan Joseph Segundo, born 1787; José María (1789); José Antonio María (1791); Hilario Leon José (1792); José Santos (1796); José Manuel Victoriano Diego (1797); María Eugenia (1802); José Francisco (1803); María Augustinia (1807); and María de los Angeles (birthdate unknown). All were born at San Diego, except José María, who was born at Mission San Gabriel, and María

² As a *mulata*, María Gertrudes Camacho was the child of an *español* and a *negro*. During the colonial period, 1519 to 1821, around 200,000 Africans entered colonial New Spain. While the majority were slaves, by the late 1600s, many skilled and resourceful individuals were able to buy their freedom and assimilate into colonial society (Meyer and Sherman 1979:214-215).

de los Angeles, whose birthplace is unknown (San Diego Historical Society (SDHS), Silvas file; LaCoste, Silvas file).

María Gertrudes Camacho de Silvas died sometime around 1836. Jose Manuel then married Tecla Regalado on September 15, 1837. Herself recently widowed from Pedro Regalado, Tecla Regalado de Silvas was a neophyte from Mission San Diego (SDHS, Silvas file; LaCoste Notes).

Traditionally, in an environment where Hispanic men outnumbered Hispanic women, many presidial soldiers married women of Native American ancestry. The Spanish crown and church condoned and often encouraged such marriages in order to give the colony stability (Meyer and Sherman 1979:209). As a mission neophyte, Tecla Regalado was educated and baptized by the padres into the Roman Catholic faith. Her background suggests that she may have incorporated Spanish civil and ecclesiastic mores and customs with certain traditional native cooking, healing, child-rearing and religious practices.

This notion is perhaps supported by artifacts uncovered at the McCoy House site, which reflect the presence of Native American peoples or technologies during the historic period (Felton 1995:12). It is possible that José Manuel Silvas and Tecla Regalado may have occupied the site prior to its coming into the possession of Silvas' daughter, María Eugenia, or perhaps alongside her in an extended family setting. Further archaeological research may reveal evidence of the fusion of traditional native and frontier Spanish/Mexican cultures.

José Manuel Silvas' military career spanned some fifty years on the frontier. During that time he served under two flags, that of Bourbon Spain and, after 1821, the Republic of Mexico (Pourade 1961:130). While it is not yet known when he retired from active duty (or when he died), records indicate that he was listed as *invalido*, sickly, as opposed to healthy or *robusto*, between the marriages of his son José Antonio Silvas to María Clara Canedo on January 21, 1810, and his daughter María Eugenia to José Ramon Diego Lisalde on April 28, 1816. However, by 1833, he was in good health and had risen to the rank of sergeant at the San Diego Presidio. Records also indicate that Sergeant Silvas was *mayordomo* or overseer of the *asistencia* at Santa Ysabel, hiring a *negocios subalterno*, or business clerk, at \$3.00 per month (SDHS, Silvas and Lisalde files; Bancroft 1966:617).

Three of Jose Manuel Silvas' sons became leather-jacket soldiers at the San Diego Presidio: José Antonio, Juan, and José Antonio María (SDHS, Silvas file). Jose Antonio's son, José Antonio Nicasio Silvas, married María Antonia Machado, the daughter of

pioneer leather-jacket soldier José Manuel Machado (California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR) 1945; CDPR 1965). Machado, who had come to San Diego in 1782, was an affluent *ranchero* and, as a wedding present, built an adobe home for the newlyweds in Old Town. This house, the Casa de Machado-Silvas, has been restored and is presently operated as a house-museum by the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

MARIA EUGENIA SILVAS

On April 28, 1816, 14-year-old María Eugenia Silvas, daughter of Jose Manuel Silvas, married San Diego leather-jacket soldier and widower José Ramon Diego Lisalde (sometimes spelled Elisalde). Lisalde was the 30-year-old son of the veteran Sinaloan Pedro Antonio Lisalde, an *español*, and María Encarnación Pérez, a coyote from the Yaqui River, Sinaloa (Mason 1978:417; SDHS, Lisalde file).³ Besides being a soldier at the presidio, at one time Lisalde was also *mayordomo* of Mission San Diego (SDHS, Silvas file).

María Eugenia had at least four children by Lisalde: José Antonio, María Francisca, Juliana and Marciano. Sometime around 1830, Lisalde died, and María Eugenia married Calixto José Antonio Ybarra (or Ibarra). Born in San Diego in 1791, Calixto Ybarra was the son of Francisco Juan Antonio Ybarra, *color quebrado*,⁴ from Mazatlan de los Mulatos, Sinaloa, and María de los Angeles Velásquez, a coyote, from Villa de Sinaloa (Northrop 1984:334; Mason 1978:417). Francisco Ybarra had come to Los Angeles in 1781. He was a member of the San Diego Presidio from 1781 to 1788; a guard at Mission San Juan Capistrano from 1788 until 1790; and served again at San Diego until his retirement in 1804. He moved to Los Angeles and lived there until his death in 1812 (SDHS, Ybarra file).

³ A coyote was someone of mixed Spanish and Indian blood, usually one-quarter of the former and three-quarters of the latter (Mason 1978:423, note 23).

⁴ A person designated as *color quebrado* had, in theory, some trace of black blood (Mason 1978:419). There is some confusion as to what percentage of black racial characteristics had to be present in order to differentiate between *mulato* and *color quebrado*. By the late sixteenth century, persons classified as *mulatos* in the frontier could have as much as three-quarters, or as little as three-sixteenths African blood (Mason 1978:423, Note 23).

María Eugenia Silvas and Calixto Ybarra had at least seven children: José Joaquín, born 1832; María Antonia (1834); María Francesca Ramona (1838); María Ramona (ca. 1840); Jocomé Monca (1841); José Dolores (1844); and Santiago, birthdate unknown (SDHS, Ybarra and Silvas files).

THE OCCUPATION OF BLOCK 408 BY THE SILVAS FAMILY

Early maps of the pueblo show three structures present on the lot owned by Maria Eugenia Silvas. Because no deed records for the property exist prior to 1851, it is unknown whether Maria Eugenia was the original owner of the parcel. She was a young married woman during the 1820s, the period of first settlement of the pueblo of San Diego. As such, she may well have owned the property in her own right from the very beginning, and housed her growing family there. Equally possible is the fact that the lot may have originally been granted to one of her two husbands, as payment for their service to the presidio, or even to her father, José Manuel Silvas.

In 1906, historian William E. Smythe interviewed Blas Aguilar, a distant cousin by marriage of María Eugenia Silvas. The 96-year-old Aguilar reminisced about a number of adobes still standing in what by then had become known as Old Town San Diego. Aguilar stated that none of these were built prior to 1820, the Casa de Ruiz, the oldest, being erected in 1821 by Captain Francisco María Ruiz (Smythe 1907:131). Associated with this and other adobes were small subsistence gardens or *huertas*, in which settlers grew fruit and vegetables to augment their diet and sold the surplus to the soldiers at the presidio (Schutz 1985:69).

Aguilar listed a number of other gardens in and around Old Town that were being cultivated around 1821. Among these was the garden of José Manuel Silvas (misspelled "Silbas" by Smythe) (Smythe 1907:131-132). While there is no way to locate this garden with any certainty, it is possible that it was associated with the adobe foundation remains found on Block 408 at the McCoy House Site.

Sergeant Silvas might have acquired the property sometime in the 1820s in lieu of payment for services from a monetarily strapped Mexican government (Camarillo 1984:6). By this time, the presidio was practically uninhabitable, and many soldiers chose to live with their families at the foot of Presidio Hill near the river bed (Crane 1991:105).

Early structures at the pueblo of San Jose, founded in 1777, were built of vertical stakes driven into the ground and interwoven with branches in basket-weave fashion. Wet adobe clay was then

plastered over the branches to form walls. The structure's roof was then made with poles tied in place and covered with thatch (Miranda 1987:12:6). Archeological excavation has revealed a number of post holes near the Silvas adobe foundations, which may relate to this earlier, less permanent type of structure (Felton 1995:25).

Later on, more permanent homes were constructed out of hand-formed adobe mud blocks. However, these were far from luxurious. None had indoor fireplaces, nor glass windows, the floors were of packed earth, and any interior furnishings were primitive. The adobe would have been used only for sleeping; all other family activities, such as cooking and eating, were done outside. During rainy days, mud would have been all-pervasive (Miranda 1987:6).

Rations provided to the soldiers by the presidio, including corn, beans, rice, lard, chile, and brown sugar, were augmented by fish, game, and the produce of the gardens kept by most families (Miranda 1987:7).

MARIA EUGENIA SILVAS LEAVES SAN DIEGO

The association of María Eugenia's family with the site on Blocks 407/408 came to an end on September 6, 1851. On that day, she deeded title to the land to Julian Ames, a former hunter of sea otter hides from Massachusetts (Smythe 1907:265). The deed noted that she was "late of the City and County of San Diego," indicating that she had relocated elsewhere by that date (SDCRO, Deeds C:367). Her husband, Calixto Ybarra, had moved to Los Angeles around 1846 (Bancroft 1969:689). He appears to have taken most of their children with him, because, by 1850, only María Eugenia and her eldest son, José Joaquin, were listed in the U.S. Census taken that year. Enumerated with her at the time were 35-year old Mexican laborer Francisco Albaña and his four California-born children (Census 1850:14). Perhaps Albaña was renting the parcel from the Silvas-Ybarra family after their relocation to Los Angeles. María Eugenia's presence in the 1850 census may indicate continued financial ties to Old Town; perhaps she and her son were in San Diego to arrange for the sale of the property.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Archival and genealogical sources available in the Los Angeles area may provide more information on María Eugenia Silvas after her departure from San Diego. Census and church records may

reveal her place of residence, date and place of death, and survivors. Armed with this information, it may be possible to trace descendants as oral history informants.

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